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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 002060

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [BA](#) [REGION](#) [BILAT](#) [OFFICIALS](#)
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER COVERS REGIONAL ISSUES WITH
AMBASSADOR

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid told the Ambassador December 14 that Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki had used "typically harsh" language in his speech at the December 8-10 IISS conference in Bahrain. When asked why the King had met with Mottaki, Shaikh Khalid said that the GOB had not responded to Mottaki's request to visit at the end of October, at the time of the Leading Edge exercise, and so it had agreed to see him during the conference. Shaikh Khalid complained that the GCC had been unable to develop a common position on Iran during the recent summit meeting, with Oman and Qatar refusing to go along with the other four members. In his speech at the IISS conference, Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari had touched on the issue of sectarianism, and Shaikh Khalid said Bahrain agrees with Zebari that this is a serious matter. The GCC had decided that members should reach out to all Iraqis, not just the Sunnis. Shaikh Khalid suggested that to strengthen the Iraqi government, "the old bureaucrats" with no connection to Saddam be brought back in. During his recent visit to Manama, Palestinian PM Haniyah had requested Bahraini financial assistance for social services. Shaikh Khalid said Bahrain might consider providing assistance, but only through the World Food Program. End Summary.

Iran's "Typically Harsh" Language At Conference

¶2. (C) Opening their December 14 meeting, Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa told the Ambassador that the December 8-10 IISS Manama Dialogue had been a great success, but people had been asking why no Cabinet or sub-Cabinet-level American official attended. There was talk that the U.S. was not ready to be asked about the Iraq Study Group recommendation about meeting with Iran. The Ambassador responded that there had been many developments in the days leading up to the conference that had precluded any senior official from coming.

¶3. (C) Shaikh Khalid said Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki had spoken in "typically harsh" language during the conference. The Ambassador noted that King Hamad had met with only two officials during the conference - Mottaki and Saudi intelligence chief Prince Muqrin. He asked why the King had seen Mottaki, pointing out that it did not send the right signal. Shaikh Khalid said Mottaki had requested to visit in late October, at the same time as the Proliferation Security Initiative Leading Edge exercise. Bahrain had not responded to that request and so had agreed to see him during the IISS conference. The meeting was "nothing too

important," with the King and Mottaki discussing bilateral relations, particularly economic relations. The King had told Mottaki that Iran should play a constructive role in Iraq, and Mottaki said Iran was already doing so. The King emphasized that Iran's nuclear program must be peaceful. Mottaki replied, "Why would we want a nuclear bomb? We don't need it." Shaikh Khalid told the Ambassador that Iranian officials' language about the nuclear program keeps changing.

GCC Splits on Iran, Currency Union

¶4. (C) Shaikh Khalid said that Iran had been on the GCC Summit agenda. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE had agreed on a common position on Iran, but Oman and Qatar "had not been helpful." Oman even objected to a statement on the GCC's environmental concerns about the Bushehr reactor. "We cannot afford to be divided at this time," Shaikh Khalid said. He returned to an issue he had raised several times before, the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Their differences represent "a major impediment" to the GCC acting in a unified way, and "it is taking us nowhere." He urged the U.S. to help the two countries resolve their problems, telling them not to be so hard-headed. Bahrain wants to maintain good relations with both sides. He noted that Qatar had asked Bahrain to meet with representatives of the Islamic Courts from Somalia, but Bahrain had refused. Shaikh Khalid reported that Oman had decided not to join the GCC currency union at this time. Bahrain and other GCC partners were proceeding without Oman.

GCC Support for All Iraq, Not Just Sunnis

MANAMA 00002060 002 OF 002

¶5. (C) Shaikh Khalid recalled that in his speech to the IISS conference, Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari had touched on the important point of sectarianism. "We agree with each other that this is a serious matter," Shaikh Khalid said. Sectarianism could result in Iraqi society being cut up into pieces, between and within sects, pointing to the rift between SCIRI and the Sadrists. The Minister asked the Ambassador about the outcome of Abdul Aziz Al Hakim's visit to Washington. The Ambassador said the visit had been positive; Al Hakim wants to work with PM Al Maliki for moderation and to decrease the PM's dependence on Al Sadr. Shaikh Khalid commented that the Sunnis should also be involved. He noted that during the GCC Summit in Riyadh, the leaders had met in a closed session to discuss Iraq. They concluded that the GCC should do something for all Iraqis, not just Sunnis. King Abdullah recommended that the GCC reach out collectively to Iraq. There is skepticism that PM Al Maliki is up to the job - although he is trying to be in the middle, the GCC fears he tilts toward Iran.

¶6. (C) Shaikh Khalid reported that Arab League (AL) foreign ministers, at a recent meeting in Cairo, had pressured Zebari to establish a timeframe for launching a reconciliation program, preferably within a few months, that the AL would support. Zebari had said that an AL meeting to promote reconciliation must take place inside Iraq, in Baghdad or someplace else selected by the Iraqi government. Shaikh Khalid told the Ambassador that the initiative should not be delayed because of the security situation in Baghdad. The meeting could take place outside of Baghdad; it is enough that it happens on Iraqi territory. Shaikh Khalid recommended that to strengthen the Iraqi government, "the old bureaucrats" with no connection to Saddam should be brought back in - judges, technocrats, and subject-matter experts. He noted that GCC foreign ministers would meet in Bahrain December 27-28 to discuss what to do in Iraq "in a retreat setting." Iran will also be on the agenda.

Haniyah Request for Assistance

¶17. (C) Shaikh Khalid noted that Palestinian Prime Minister Haniyah had been in Doha for the opening of the Asian Games, and the GOB had approved a Qatari request that Haniyah visit Bahrain. Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa had been his official host. During their meeting, King Hamad told Haniyah that he should do everything possible to safeguard all progress earlier Palestinian governments had achieved. During a requested one-on-one pull-aside meeting, Haniyah asked the King for Bahraini financial assistance to improve Palestinian social services. The King said Bahrain might consider providing assistance, but only through the World Food Program, not directly to the Palestinian Authority.

¶18. (C) Shaikh Khalid recalled that during the IISS conference, he had urged Indian National Security Advisor Narayanan to play a role in dealing with Iran's nuclear program. Narayanan had responded that Iran was not being open about its program. Shaikh Khalid informed the Ambassador that he would accompany Crown Prince Salman on his first official visit to Pakistan December 20-22. They will meet with the President, Prime Minister, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. The CP was also supposed to visit India on the same trip but they were unable to work out the logistics. He plans to go to India sometime in early 2007.

Proposed Washington Visit

¶19. (C) The Foreign Minister said that he would like to visit Washington sometime in February, with the week of February 12 looking like the best time. He requested to meet with the Secretary and said he would also pursue meetings with

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National Security Advisor Hadley and members of Congress. As he does during every meeting, Shaikh Khalid asked about the status of the two remaining Bahrain detainees at Guantanamo and requested they be returned to Bahrain.

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